

QUEEN MARY

by Mrs. James Litster

Queen Mary, only daughter of the late Duke and Duchess of Teck was born in the year 1866, her birth taking place in the old London Palace where Queen Victoria was born, and, with the exception of a brief sojourn in Italy, her Majesty's childhood and youth were entirely spent in England. When only two years of age she was described as "as sweet and engaging a child as you can wish to see, full of life and fun, and as playful as a kitten". She and the Prince of Wales were intimate in childhood, and it was at one time said that her affections were set on King George's elder brother, the late Duke of Clarence. At any rate her marriage to the younger brother has been a singularly happy one.

As a girl Queen Mary was devoted to charitable work, and she and her mother had the commendable habit of always having by them a bit of needlework which they could take up in odd moments. It is impossible however to give even the briefest character sketch of Queen Mary without mentioning again, and yet again her great-hearted mother, who gave her the best possible training for the exalted position she was destined to ultimately occupy. Warm hearted and overflowing with human sympathy as was the late Duchess of Teck, she had yet strict, and what most people would now think old fashioned, notions concerning education. She wrote to an intimate friend: "A child has quite enough to do to learn obedience and to attend to her lessons, and to grow, without many parties and late hours, which take the freshness of childhood away, and the brightness and beauty from girlhood."

The late Duchess made herself the companion and closest friend of all her children, and she never delegated to others her duties and responsibilities as a mother. To give one example, as a young girl the Queen was allowed to read no novel which her mother has not at least glanced through. This, fortunately, does not mean that the Duchess had narrow views with regard to literature; the future Queen's favorite authors, and that even when she was quite a young girl, were George Eliot and Carlyle.

It is well to insist on the way the Queen's girlhood was spent, for it set her apart even in those far-off days from those Princesses of her own age who were leading the curiously restricted, sheltered life led by young women belonging to highest caste. The Princess, through her mother, was in constant touch with those woman-workers who made the wide field of charity their own. The Duchess of Teck was specially concerned with all that affected the coming generation, and, as her mother's secretary and untiring helper, Princess Mary as the London Chronicle points out, must have unconsciously become cognizant of all sorts of facts, mostly either terrible or grey, concerning the lives of those who toil, and of the effect of their toil upon their children.

In the winter of 1883-84 the Duchess and Duke of Teck went with their daughter to Florence, and it is curious fact that the lady who is now Queen of England made her first formal debut at a party at the Florentine British Consulate. As natural head of the foreign colony, the Duchess of Teck received all the most interesting and distinguished people passing through Florence, and during the formative period of her life the Queen must have had many interesting experiences, the more so that her parents took advantage of their sojourn in a foreign town to have her taught both music and painting by the best Italian Masters. In this connection it may be stated that her Majesty is very musical, and sings remarkably well.